

Area Plan Summary

IRVINE AVENUE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Addendum to the Comprehensive Plan for Saint Paul

Recommended by the Planning Commission, October 11, 2002

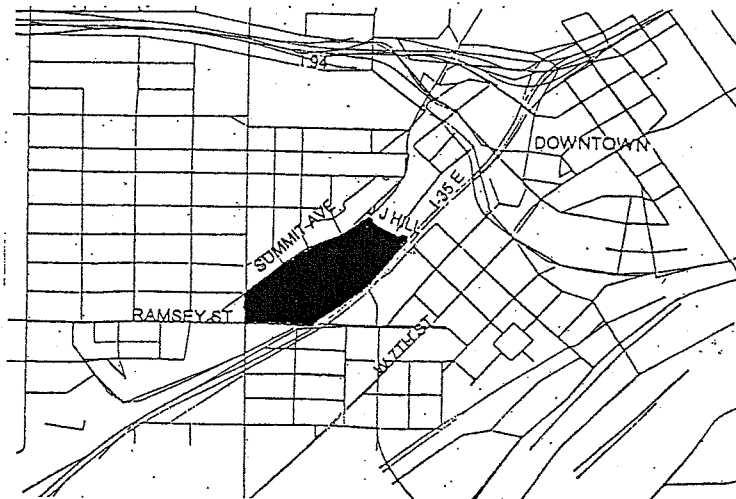
Adopted by the City Council, April 2, 2003

This plan represents the community vision for the preservation the Irvine Avenue hillside and for reasonable, limited development of Irvine and Pleasant Avenue properties. It appends to the Comprehensive Plan. Key actions for Irvine Avenue are:

- ☐ *Rezone vacant buildable areas to single family (except lots on Pleasant Avenue between nursing home and Walnut stairs).*
- ☐ *Prevent the creation of lots that are too steep to build on.*
- ☐ *Require an engineering analysis of surface and ground water before construction plans are approved and require closer monitoring of the actual construction.*
- ☐ *Establish hillside development guidelines to be used by the City in reviewing site plans for proposed construction.*
- ☐ *Require more off-street parking for new development.*
- ☐ *Improve communication between the neighborhood and the City about development projects and enforcement.*

Location

The Irvine Avenue Plan covers the area from Summit Avenue on the north to I-35E on the south and from Ramsey Street on the west to James J. Hill mansion property on the east.



Goal/Vision

Irvine Avenue should remain a low-density residential area due to the steep slopes and the narrow roadway. Seen from a distance--for example, from the High Bridge--the Irvine Avenue hillside should appear predominantly wooded with a few buildings peaking through the trees. On top, Summit Avenue rooflines should play with the tree-tops. Under the trees within the neighborhood, Irvine Avenue should appear as a wooded lane punctuated by buildings and retaining walls. Any new buildings should blend into the historic and natural character of the area. Garage doors should be downplayed architecturally so that the street doesn't end up looking like an alley. Construction should be engineered to take into account the stability and hydrology of the slopes.

Specific Recommendations and Implementation Steps

Zoning Lots and Districts

Most of Irvine Avenue is currently zoned RT-2 for fourplexes and townhouses because most of the lots used to run all the way from Summit Avenue to Irvine. RT-2 is the proper zoning for Summit Avenue, but improper for Irvine. The Irvine hillside should be down-zoned to single family because: (a) the roadway is too steep and narrow to handle more traffic; (b) there is hardly any on-street parking; (c) development activity should be minimized on steep slopes where erosion and water management are recurrent problems; and (d) the natural tree cover should be retained for its beauty and for erosion control.

1. Amend the lot split regulations to prohibit the creation of any new lots where the existing building pad area is steeper than 18 percent (for comparison, Ramsey Street is 11 percent) or where a driveway to the proposed house site is impossible. However, lot splits on Irvine Avenue will be permitted where the existing building pad area is up to 25 percent provided that a building plan is submitted that meets the hillside development guidelines.
2. Rezone houses and vacant land with access along Irvine Avenue from RT-2 (fourplexes and townhouses) to single-family to reduce the lot coverage by buildings and save more trees. The north side of Irvine should be rezoned to R-2, which requires a minimum lot area of 7,200 square feet per unit. The row of houses on the south side of Irvine should be rezoned to R-3, which requires a minimum lot area of 6,000 square feet per unit.

These rezonings, as shown on the proposed zoning map, should apply both to existing Irvine Avenue lots and also to the 150 feet closest to Irvine of large lots that extend through from Summit Avenue or Ramsey Street. Where arbitrary zoning boundaries are drawn 150 feet from Irvine, they will be adjusted automatically by the Planning Administrator to match the actual rear lot lines as new Irvine Avenue lots are created. (On these "through lots", the proposed zoning boundaries will be an exception to the customary zoning practice of avoiding "split zoning"--i.e., more than one zoning

classification on a single parcel of land. But if the Irvine frontage is not rezoned, some fourplexes and townhouses could be built along Irvine on through lots with an existing Summit Avenue residence on top. The current RT-2 zoning, unlike single-family and duplex zoning, allows more than one main building on a single zoning lot.)

3. The multi-family properties on Irvine should be zoned as they are used, i.e., the "Lander townhouses" at 275-285 Irvine should have RT-1 duplex zoning, and the Irvine Hill Condominiums and the nursing home should remain RM-2.
4. The "nose lot" at the hairpin turn (264-266-268 Irvine) should be kept in its current RT-2 zoning so that the developer of the recently developed double house can build the third unit that was part of his original condominium development plan. This lot can accommodate a third unit because the lot is over 18,000 square feet, has access from Pleasant Avenue, and will cause no groundwater or drainage problems for other parcels.
5. The parcel on Pleasant Avenue just to the west of the Irvine Hill Condominiums should also be kept in its current RT-2 (fourplex/townhouse) zoning because: it faces I-35E, it has good access from Pleasant Avenue, which has on-street parking; and it will cause no groundwater or drainage problems for other parcels. The front, buildable part of the lot is not very steep and most of the trees are on the steep rear part.

For this property, any future development shall be designed to accommodate views from the houses above on Irvine Avenue. New buildings shall not significantly obstruct views of the river valley from the first floor (i.e., street-level) rear windows of these houses. View protection shall be addressed in the City's site plan review process.

6. The two parcels on Pleasant Avenue adjoining the nursing home parking lot to the east are owned by the nursing home. The nursing home envisions its own future offices and related nursing home facilities on the lot. This plan supports in concept the nursing home's future use of the property and supports rezoning the two parcels to RM-2, which allows apartment buildings and nursing homes, at such time as the nursing home develops

Figure B

Irvine Avenue Study Existing Zoning

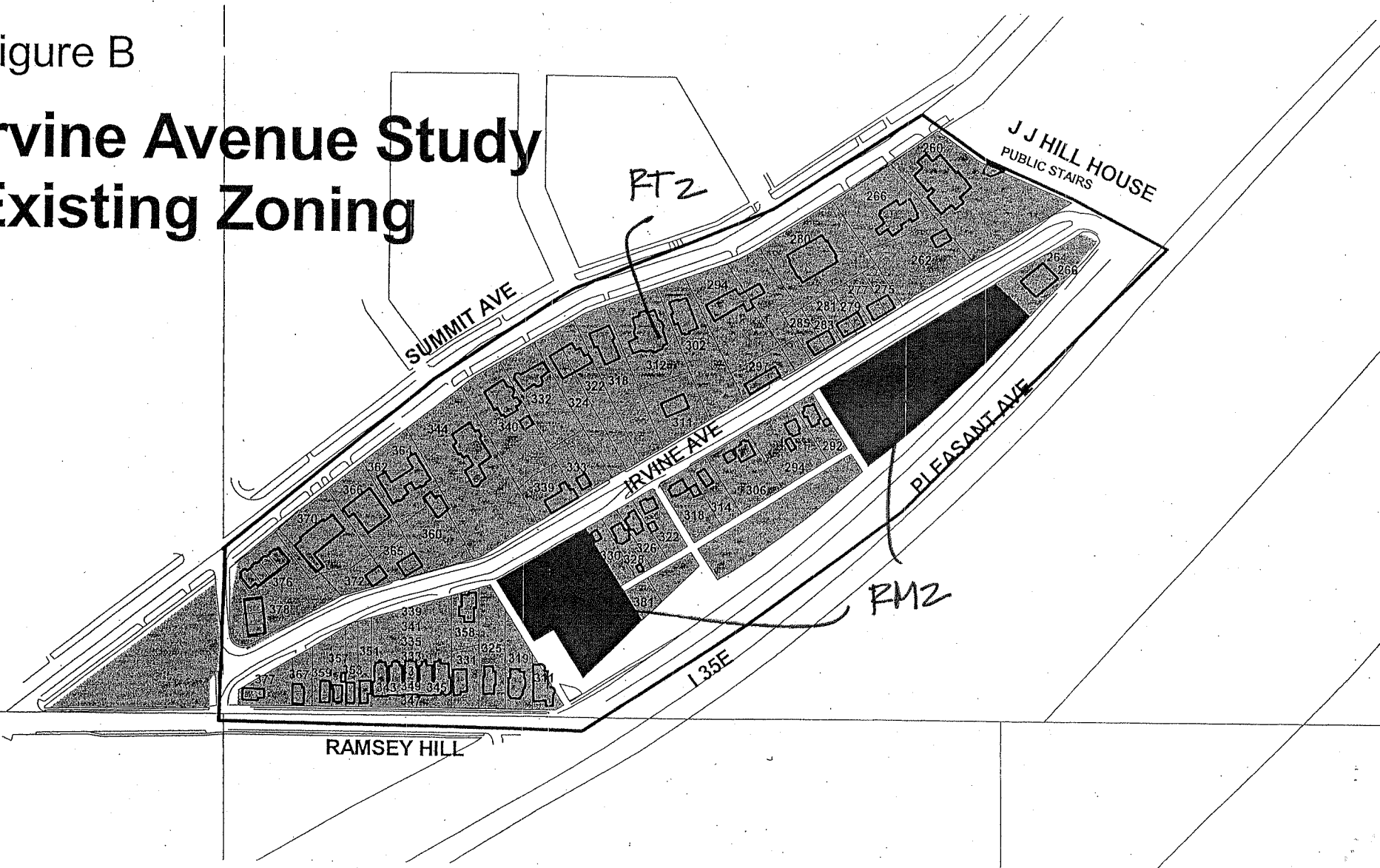




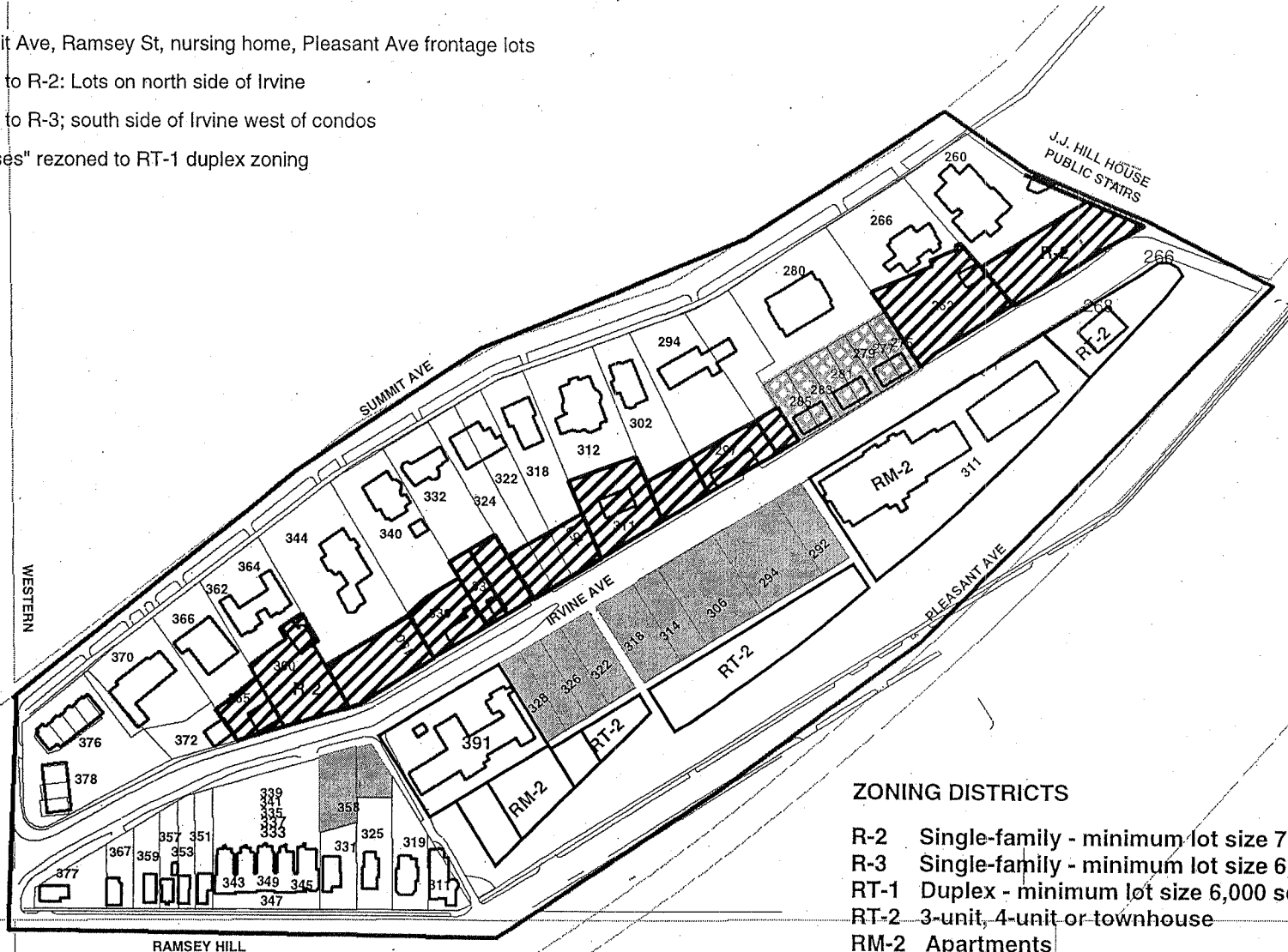


Figure C

Irvine Avenue Study - Proposed Zoning

Planning Commission Recommendations, 10/11/02. This zoning map was legally adopted by the City Council on 4/2/03.

-  No change: Summit Ave, Ramsey St, nursing home, Pleasant Ave frontage lots
-  Rezone from RT-2 to R-2: Lots on north side of Irvine
-  Rezone from RT-2 to R-3; south side of Irvine west of condos
-  "Lander Townhouses" rezoned to RT-1 duplex zoning



ZONING DISTRICTS

- R-2 Single-family - minimum lot size 7,200 sq. ft.
- R-3 Single-family - minimum lot size 6,000 sq. ft.
- RT-1 Duplex - minimum lot size 6,000 sq. ft.
- RT-2 3-unit, 4-unit or townhouse
- RM-2 Apartments

specific plans. But this plan does not support rezoning to RM-2 right now because, if the nursing home expansion does not come to fruition, the property should remain available for fourplex or townhouse development under RT-2; it should not be zoned for a larger apartment building.

(Figure B shows existing zoning and Figure C shows the proposed zoning.)

Parking

7. Due to the lack of on-street parking, more off-street parking is necessary than for most places in the city. For new construction, require two off-street parking spaces per housing unit that meet all zoning requirements for setbacks and paving. (This is more than the citywide standard of 1.5 off-street parking spaces.) In addition, require a guest parking area for at least one additional vehicle per unit. Guest spaces could be provided on a driveway; they would be exempt from setback requirements and could be paved with gravel.
8. On-street parking should be controlled better by:
 - a. Putting up more signs where parking is currently restricted or prohibited;
 - b. Making the parking restrictions uniform on Pleasant Avenue from Ramsey Street to the hairpin turn. (At present the parking restrictions, due to the placement of signs, appear to end at the Irvine Hill Condominiums.)
 - c. Area residents intend to initiate a residential permit parking district along Pleasant Avenue, along sections of Irvine that have on-street parking, and possibly on Ramsey Street as well. As the hospital has grown and Xcel Arena patrons have learned where they can park for free, the neighborhood streets have turned into parking lots for employees and event goers. (Within residential permit parking districts, residents can buy an annual permit to park on the street; nonresidents are prohibited from parking there.)
9. Traffic speeds need to be controlled on Irvine Avenue because the roadway is narrow with houses close to the pavement and because pedestrians walk in the street. The problem is greatest between the criss-cross and the hairpin turn where there are "straight-aways" on both the upper and lower roadways. Public Works will do a speed study on these segments and will discuss the results and engineering options with residents. It is possible that the most feasible solutions may be citizen-initiated traffic calming techniques, for example, those described in *Street Reclaiming* by David Engwicht (New Society Publishers, 1999). The neighborhood can request help from the Saint Paul Traffic Calming Alliance, a citizen organization that was recently funded by the McKnight Foundation.

Hillside Design and Development Guidelines

10. Hillside development guidelines for Irvine Avenue and Pleasant Avenue east of Ramsey Street should be incorporated into the City's Zoning Code. The purposes of these guidelines are to preserve Irvine Avenue's character as predominantly wooded and to protect the geology of the hillside. Surface and ground water management, in particular, have been the greatest source of neighborhood dissatisfaction; changing water movement on any given lot may cause changes on other lots. Items "a" through "h" below are mandatory standards for site plan review. Items "i" through "k" are advisory.

Mandatory Design Standards

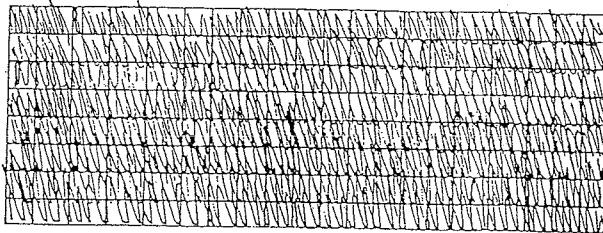
- a. An engineering report must be prepared by a registered hydrological, geotechnical or soils engineer and submitted to the City for review and approval before any grading or tree removal occurs. The engineering report must include:
 1. An evaluation of existing conditions including slope stability, ground water, and surface water. Testing should use techniques that minimize disturbance to existing slopes and vegetation (for example, drilling cores for soil samples rather than digging with a back hoe.)
 2. Site-specific recommendations for construction. Recommendations will depend on site conditions but may include construction of a cut-off trench with drain tiles away from the building, installation of drain tiles at or under the foundation, water-proofing and damp-proofing walls, poured concrete foundations and sump pumps. (See Appendix C for information about these and other techniques to mitigate the problems, and Appendix D for a listing problems with past developments along Irvine Avenue.)
- b. At least three on-site inspections must be conducted: prior to grading, after grading, and during installation of any special measures required to deal with slope stability or water conditions. These inspections must be attended by City staff, the builder and the engineer who prepared the report. The engineer must update the report as needed to reflect any conditions observed during these inspections that were not anticipated in the original report. A copy of the updated report must be submitted to the City. To ensure that the project is built according to the approved plans, LIEP staff will require that a security agreement be submitted as specified in Section 62.108 (g) of the Zoning Code.
- c. The height and scale of buildings shall fit within the tree canopy. (This guideline is consistent with the height limits for the residential zoning districts: 30 feet in single-family and duplex zones; 40 feet for townhouses or three- and four-unit buildings; 50 feet for apartment buildings.)
- d. Buildings shall be designed to fit into the hillside with minor or moderate regrading; the hillside shall not be significantly regraded to accommodate new buildings. There is no simple way to quantify this standard, but its purpose is to maintain the stability of slopes and to save trees, while preventing excessively tall retaining walls and unattractive trough-shaped yards between buildings and retaining walls.
- e. Vertical dimensions of buildings shall be emphasized over horizontal dimensions.

- Multi-story houses are encouraged; low, horizontal types of houses like ramblers are prohibited.
- f. Garage doors shall be downplayed architecturally and front doors should be made inviting and prominent. While it is aesthetically desirable to put garage doors behind the front door or to the rear or the side of the house, these design alternatives can be impractical for steep lots without alleys and where pavement aggravates run-off problems.
 - g. Existing trees (but not buckthorn) shall be preserved where possible. Irvine Avenue itself should appear as a wooded lane. (See Figure D on the Figure-Ground Relationship Between Trees and Building on the Irvine Avenue Hillside.) Trees to be preserved should be protected during construction. New trees should be planted to partially obscure parking lots and new hillside buildings.
 - h. New retaining walls shall be built of stone or masonry materials and shall be designed to last. Retaining walls taller than four feet shall be constructed under City permit with frost footings as required by the State Building Code and shall be engineered to retain lateral earth pressures consistent with the principles of soils mechanics, and shall be detailed to minimize hydrostatic pressures. On a case by case basis, LIEP may relax these standards for retaining walls that serve minor landscaping purposes.

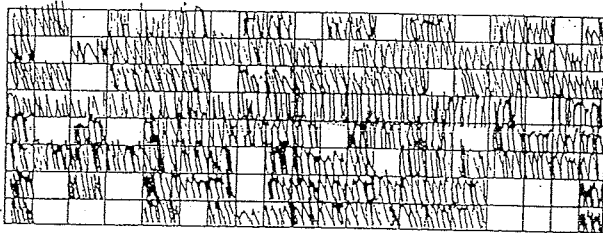
Advisory Design Guidelines

- i. Houses should have gable or hipped roofs with angles that respond to the slope of the land.
 - j. Houses should harmonize with the natural environment through the choice of exterior materials and colors. Exterior materials are regulated on the north side of Irvine through the Heritage Preservation Commission; they are not regulated on the south side of the street. The City does not regulate color.
 - k. Since view protection is important to everyone, there should be neighborly contact and "negotiation" during the design stage of new construction or major landscaping projects about its anticipated effects on other homes.
11. The property owners on the Irvine Avenue hillside should continue to work cooperatively to eradicate buckthorn from the hillside. Common buckthorn is an exotic species that was widely used for hedges in the first half of the twentieth century. It has spread widely in parks and natural areas, where it is crowding out native and desirable landscape species. Nurseries have been prohibited from selling it in Minnesota for several years. In the Irvine medians where buckthorn is growing between the buttressing stonework, the buckthorn removal must be done without dislodging the stones or destabilizing the slope. Buckthorn removal projects are already being done in other parts of the city, for example along Mississippi River Blvd. and Linwood Park. Small grants from Parks and Recreation are available in 2002 for volunteer buckthorn removal projects. It is unknown whether there will be funding in future years.

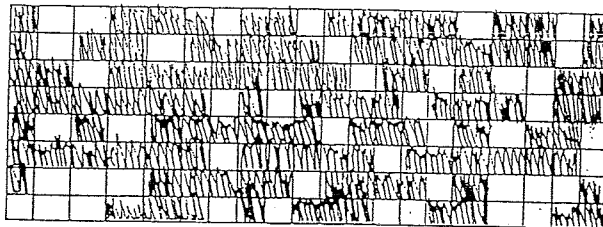
Figure-Ground Relationship Between Trees and Buildings on the Irvine Avenue Hillside



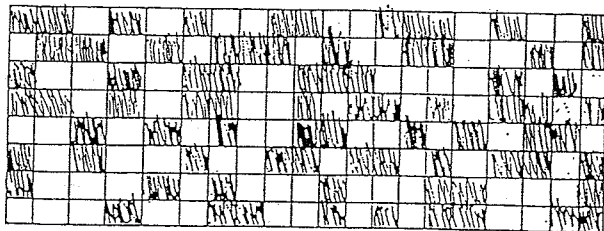
Tree-covered hillside.



Current state of hillside. Tree canopy dominates with limited development.



Hillside with limited additional development permitted by the Irvine Avenue Plan. Tree canopy still dominates.



Potential for hillside without limits on development. Buildings dominate.

Figure D.

Historic Character

12. The north side of Irvine Avenue is within the Historic Hill District. The guidelines for the historic district should include a policy on preserving Irvine Avenue's historic character as a lane of homes and carriage houses, recognizing how distinct the street is from most of Ramsey Hill--e.g., irregular spacing of buildings; wide variation in setbacks from the street; naturalistic landscaping instead of lawns; and carriage houses facing the street.

City Communications and Enforcement

13. When construction takes place, communications among the City, community organizations, and immediate residents should be improved. All parties need to be aware of agreements made between a developer and the other parties. District councils and other neighborhood representatives need to submit agreements that have been made with a developer to the appropriate City body in writing so that the City is aware of them. The City will incorporate the terms of these agreements in any City approvals to the extent permitted by City regulations and policy. Developers must adhere to these agreements. If any significant changes are made to the plans that affect these agreements, the City will inform neighborhood representatives, send them a copy of the plan for their review and give them adequate time to respond to the changes.
14. The City must enforce, to the full extent possible, all of the conditions that it places on developments during the review process. Appendix D lists the series of development problems that occurred during the 1990s due to misunderstandings, inadequate regulations, and/or lax enforcement.

City Actions

- ☐ Adopt this plan for Irvine Avenue
- ☐ Amend the Zoning Code with regard to: permissible lot splits on steep slopes; parking standards on Irvine; and the hillside development guidelines in this plan, which include standards for hydrology, slope stability, and visual character.
- ☐ Amend the zoning maps based on this plan
- ☐ Install more signs showing on-street parking restrictions
- ☐ Amend the Historic Hill District Guidelines to be more specific about Irvine Avenue
- ☐ When development is proposed, improve communications between the City, the neighborhood, and the developer
- ☐ Enforce conditions that are attached to development approvals

Planning Commission Finding

The Planning Commission finds that the *Irvine Avenue Development Plan* is consistent with the *Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan* and other adopted City policies.

Planning Process

The Irvine Avenue Plan was prepared in response to a request by the City Council in October 2001. The CapitolRiver Council and the Planning Commission jointly created an Irvine Avenue Planning Committee with representation from Irvine Avenue residents, Summit Avenue residents, the College of the Visual Arts, which also hosted the committee meetings, and the four neighborhood organizations that surround Irvine Avenue (listed below.) The committee was co-chaired by an Irvine Avenue resident and a Planning Commission member. It met six times between November 2001 and April 2002, and held a neighborhood public meeting on its preliminary recommendations in March 2002.

The plan and zoning amendments were supported by the following neighborhood organizations:

CapitolRiver Council on August 26, 2002
Ramsey Hill Association on August 9, 2002
West Seventh/Fort Road Federation on May 13, 2002
Summit Hill Association on July 25, 2002

Several appendices were prepared to give more detail and more technical information in support of the recommendations in the Irvine Avenue Development Plan. The appendices are available from the Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 25 W. Fourth Street, Suite 1100, Saint Paul, MN 55102 or by calling Larry Soderholm, Planning Administrator, at 651-266-6575.

- Appendix A: City Council Resolution Initiating Irvine Avenue Development Plan
- Appendix B: Maps of Land Use, District Council Boundaries, City Council Ward Boundaries, and the Historic Hill District
- Appendix C: Geology and Hydrology of the Irvine Avenue Hillside and Mitigation Techniques
- Appendix D: List of Irvine Avenue Development Issues During the 1990s
- Appendix E: Hillside Protection Policy: Saint Paul and Cincinnati
- Appendix H: Proposed Zoning Code Amendments
- Appendix F: Membership of the Irvine Avenue Planning Committee